

EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY

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CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST, IN OXFORD,

ON

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

BY THE

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S. MATT. xxv. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous into life everlasting.

Who is God? What am I? If you answer this question honestly to yourself, you have subdued every difficulty which men raise against the faith. Is God then our Maker, or do we make our god? Are we His creatures, the works of His hands, absolutely at His disposal, to whom He gives laws, which, at our great peril, we must obey? Or is our god, like the idols of old, which we have unlearnt in name, which we ridicule, “the work of our hands, which,” not “our fingers” but, our own minds “have made,” the conception of our intellect, whose being and character *we* are to regulate, who is not to act otherwise than according to the laws which we assign to him, what commends itself to our—we will not use the old Theological terms, Omniscience or Omnipotence, they have associations inconveniently grand for us; nor must we say our highly *gifted*, highly *endowed* nature, for this implies an Author Who endowed it—well, we will be modest and say, what approves itself to our moral nature? Does our God reveal Himself

to us, and unfold to us His Greatness, His Majesty, His Holiness, His Justice? or do we discover him, as we might some new planet, only that this magnificent world around us has its fixed laws without us, which we cannot contradict, but our god, since he is invisible, is to be formed *ad libitum*, the transcript of our own excellences, such as we could imagine them to be, if multiplied a thousand-fold? Is He then only just as we are just, holy as we, His Archetypes, are holy, good as we are good; yet so that none of these qualities in our god are to exceed the balance and proportion, which we can discover in our best-ordered natural selves? I say, "our natural selves," for when we come to grace, we know that millions upon millions have had other conceptions of God's awful holiness and justice, than it is proposed now to tolerate.

We are told, that human reason is prepared to capitulate as to all the old difficulties which it used to be so busy in parading, the doctrine of the All-Holy Trinity or the Incarnation^a. It will own the past ge-

^a "But if the wants and yearnings of the human heart, if a sense of perfect harmony with every moral perception (whether implanted or acquired,) are leading and will lead men to a belief in the Incarnation, the Trinity in Unity, or any other truth flowing out of these; there are other dogmas from which these same wants and yearnings, the same perceptions of the essential agreement between divine and human goodness, will altogether repel them. The strong arm of ecclesiastical authority, or the dictates of temporal interest, or a dread of public opinion, may lead men to profess belief in them; but if the doctrine of endless punishment were suffered to rest on the grounds which have led some, who denied it before, to believe that Jesus Christ is God and man, no one can doubt that the great mass of Englishmen would thankfully and indignantly reject it." *National review* vol. 16. p. 93.

neration to have been wrong in disputing about the Being of God, and will make a Concordat, allowing Almighty God to exist henceforth, as He wills. It will even admit the mystery of the Incarnation, and allow of that ineffable mystery of God become Man, that God did not disdain the Virgin's womb, God was born, was nourished at the breast, was carried to and fro, was obedient to His Mother and His foster-father, hungered, was weary, thirsted, slept, was scourged, spat upon, mocked, nailed to the Cross, died^b. For the concession of the Incarnation, if it means any thing, means all this; that He Who, as Man, bare all these sinless infirmities of our nature and all these sufferings, was Almighty God. The last and newest turn of our poor human reason is to accept all the main facts of the Gospel, even the Godhead and Manhood of our Divine Lord: only not their Divine meaning. People will even exalt the doctrine of the Incarnation, in order to overshadow the doctrine of the Cross, in which its humiliation found its deepest depth. Or they will admire, extol, the doctrine of the Cross, as “^cthe greatest moral act ever done in this world,” if only they may admire it as something purely imitable. What they shrink from is, to own its fullest adequate end, the light which it casts on the holiness of God and on His awful justice.

And yet we, who take these liberties with the attributes of God, who are we but the criminals? *We* criticise or limit the justice of God, whose name, in the language of Holy Scripture, is “^dthe unjust?”

^b See S. Athanasius against the Ar. Tr. p. 443. note h. 444. n. i. 445. n. m.

^c Jowett on the Atonement. St. Paul's Epp.

ii. p. 481.

^d ἀδίκος.

What criminal ere, by nature, owned the justice of the human law, which condemned him? If he admit that he was in the wrong, yet what punishment does not seem to him too severe? What means this never-ceasing din of murmurings, which in ever-varying accents, petulant, sullen, clamorous, sharp, defiant, blaspheming, rolls up discordantly to heaven against our God, accusing His Justice or Mercy in punishing at all or disproportionately? Every murmur from every human heart accuses knowingly or unknowingly the justice and love of God, punishing, as it thinks, unduly, relentlessly, for sin.

And now men systematize this. Reformation of the individual offender is proposed as the exclusive end of human punishment. Plainly it is not the object of Divine. And so men say, that human legislation "^a has already risen to a higher idea than, according to the popular theology, is exhibited in the justice of an all-Merciful God." Only it is not the popular theology only; they are equally the facts of nature. Punishment, but for the accepted grace of God, hardens, not softens, the offender. Punishments, which end in the excision of the offender, which cut him off in his guilt, have plainly nothing remedial, that we know of. And yet what is this whole wide world full of, to the sight of the simple unspoilt soul? What is it but one multiplying mirror of the words, "Man is full of misery?" What is this Nemesis, of which, since faith has been chilled, men's writings are so full? What is it, but a heathen confession of an unerring Hand, which guides the sin back upon the sinner's head? The book of God's works, to

^a National Review. Ib.

which men are so fond of appealing now, is a book like the Prophet's, "^b written within and without, and there was written therein lamentations and mourning and woe." Earth is as full of punishment as of guilt, filled to overflowing with guilt and misery. And, in all this, man's conscience sees but punishment; faith only can discern that it is but chastisement, if, by the grace of God, man wills. Man's conscience, until he deadens it, and most, when the uncompromising reality of thoughts of death silences all voices of self-deceit, speaks out clearly, that punishment is "^c the due reward of our deeds." The belief in Tartarus, and the unending woe there, was not, as one^d, with a double paradox, maintained, the result of the teaching of law-givers. It was antecedent to law-givers, whether it was the traditional memory of the words, "^e thou shalt surely die," or the voice of man's natural conscience, which, we know from the deepest of their philosophers^f, was quick-

^b Ezek. ii. 10. ^c S. Luke xxiii. 41. ^d Warburton, Divine Legation, maintaining that future punishment was taught by human lawgivers, and was not believed by Israel.

^e Gen. ii. 17. ^f Plato de Rep. i. 5. "Know well, he said, O Socrates, that, when any one is, or thinks he is, near dying, there entereth into him fear and anxiety as to things, in regard to which they never before came into his mind. For those myths too, which are told about those in Hades, that he who has been guilty of injustice here must pay the penalty to justice there, which had been laughed at thus far, then torture his soul lest they should be true; and he himself, either through the weakness of old age or *as being now nearer to the things there*, perceives them somewhat more clearly. He becomes then full of imaginings and fear, and considers with himself and looks whether he has injured any one. He then, who discovers many wrongs which he has done in life, oftentimes starting out of his sleep too, like children, is in a state of terror and lives amid evil anticipations."

ened in the near sight of death, and was tormented, lest the belief in judgment to be undergone there, which a man had heretofore ridiculed as fables, should indeed be true. The word "ill-deserving," Butler reminds us^g, is the verdict of human nature against us. The superstitious and erring belief of heathenism, the awe at death, the gnawing worm of conscience, the oppressiveness of guilt, the fruitlessness of efforts to bribe or beguile or assuage its relentless voice, are so many million echoes of God's judgments which fall around, and speak a heaven-implemented conviction in man's soul; 'Punishment awaits sin.'

But of what duration? All knowledge as to eternity must come from the Eternal, Whose it is. We, of ourselves, with no experience but of time, know, of course, nothing of it, it's being, it's conditions, except what Almighty God reveals to us. Our nearest idea of it is, "^hboundless life, all existing at once," "an everlasting now" of bliss or miseryⁱ. But then reason ought not to raise *à priori* objections, on the ground of *that*, of whose laws, rules, and mode of being, we know nothing. It is a common formula of those who venture to object any thing to God's revelation; "it is inconceivable that God should visit passing acts of sin with an eternity of misery." True, that all Scripture says, that our state hereafter will be determined by what we have been and have done here. On this fleeting being hangs our eternity. "^kWe must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether

^g Anal. P. i. c. 6. ^h S. Anselm Monol. c. 24.

ⁱ "An everlasting now of misery." Southey, Thalaba. ^k 2 Cor. v. 10.

good or bad." But who revealed to us, that sin ceases in the evil, when life ceases? Who told us that it is *passing* sin, which God so visits? The pleasures of sin are passing enough, yea, if men could prolong them to the years of man's life before the flood. Sinners themselves pall at them, and seek for fresh condiments of their sins. But sin itself ceases not, even with satiety of sin. Men sin, in renewing the memory of their fresher sins, which had more zest and life in them. They sin, when they can no more sin themselves, in taking pleasure in those who do them, as St. Paul says¹. They sin in memory, imagination, diseased pleasure in histories of sin, real or fictitious. Or they exchange the sin for some other, adapted to their years. But never do men abandon sin, except by willingly receiving God's converting grace. To sin on is nature. Of itself, and unless interfered with by the overwhelming grace of God, sin continues, encrusted, indurated, congealed, like the eternal ice; its surface thawed for a moment under the heat of God's love shining on it from above, but the cold mass itself, unpenetrated, unchanged. It grows, deepens, hardens, becomes more malignant, more ingrained, more a part of man's self until the hour of death. Why, unless changed even then by the grace of God, should it change in eternity?

Look at the Christian's sin. What more could God do for us, that He has not done for us? God became Man for love of us. God gave His own Co-equal Son for love of us. God the Son, made Man, died for us, suffered the Father's displeasure at our sins, the Innocent for the guilty; made us members

¹ Rom. i. 32.

of Himself; joined us as closely to Him as He could; gave us His Spirit to rule our wills; antedated reason by His grace; pleaded with us in our consciences; shone on us with His glowing love, whenever we did, by His grace, any thing to please Him; forgave us, whenever we asked Him, as soon as we asked Him; promised to forgive us whenever we should ask Him; pledged His word to us that in His service we should have peace and rest, the blessings of this life and of the life to come; surrounded us with such a prodigality of His bountifulness, to make our salvation easy to us; helped us whenever we asked Him or without our asking Him; forecame us, surrounded us, immersed us in the ever-present Ocean of His Grace. What could He have done more for us which He has not done? what has the profusion of His love kept back or kept in store, that it should win our free-will there if His Love have not won us here?

But, apart even from this, unchangeableness may be, for what we know, one of the laws of eternity. We know that it shall be of the blessed. Heaven could not be Heaven, unless they were fixed in good. Oh what a piercing pang of agony were it, what a death-throe of misery, if the thought of the possibility of failure could overshadow with the thinnest vapoury cloud the Beatific Vision of their God! What? See God, face to Face, love Him with that transforming ever-inflowing love, be ever with Jesus, thank Him, feel through and through, "What Jesus 'tis to love," and think it possible that one could again be ungrateful to His love, again sin against Him, again crucify Him? No, the impossibility of sinning must underlie all the bliss of Heaven. The ever-present

eternal Love of God must bring with it a consciousness, that it is eternal. For this cause saints have longed to die, that they might never again, in the faintest thought of their minds, displease God.

But it may be an equal law of our moral nature, that they who reject God in time, even to the end, will, by a continuance of that same fixed will, reject Him everlastingly.

Six thousand years have not changed, (except in perfecting his inventiveness of evil,) that dreadful spirit, which beheld God face to Face, and would not be of the second Order of beatified Intelligences, but chose to be first in Hell. We see before us, in that other spiritual world, for which God made us and to which we are hastening, a being, gifted with most intense intelligence, once “^a full of wisdom and perfect in beauty,” now fixed in intensest hatred of our race; yet one to whom men, in their evil, gain such a terrible likeness, that we speak of certain malice as “Satanic,” of some extreme wickedness as “devilish.” He was created in grace. Enabled by God, he beheld God. He saw in God what, gifted by God, his wondrous intelligence could see of that which it will be the bliss of eternity to behold, the Infinite Wisdom, Greatness, Goodness, Love, Blissfulness of God. He saw it; and, it is thought, because there were others higher than he, he rejected it. Any how, we know the fact, that, having rejected it, he now unchangeably hates it. And now, with the memory of What God Is, with that undying sight before him, with the knowledge too of his own intolerable misery, he has, for these six thousand years,

^a Ezek. xxviii. 12.

envied to man the bliss which he himself refused, and has, with a malice of which again we see a likeness in extreme human wickedness, sought to involve us in his own guilt and misery. Look at the picture of him, throughout the revelation of God to us. I begin with our Lord's own words. “^b A murderer from the beginning,” who “abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it.” Of him our Lord speaks as the great opponent of His kingdom, as desiring to shake through and through the faithfulness of His Apostles^c, but as himself falling from heaven^d. Of him our Lord's Apostles bid us beware, as our especial adversary, longing to destroy us^e, devising evil, crafty, tempting, deceiving, and then accusing “^f before God day and night ;” entering into the wicked^g, and filling the heart with evil^h. His being is one continual sin. St. John saith, he “ⁱ *sinneth*, from the beginning.” Into his power the evil world falls ; he is its prince^k, its god^l. The evil, our Lord says, come into a relation of terrific nearness to him ! They have him for their father, instead of God. “^m Ye are of your father the devil ; and the lusts of your father ye will do.” Six thousand years, nay, the whole course of this world, does not exhaust his malice ; the shorter the time, the greater his wrath, because, the time ended, there will be no added souls for him to destroy. Holy Scripture says again, “ⁿ Having great wrath, because

^b St. John viii. 44.

^c S. Luke xxii. 31.

^d Ib. x. 18.

^e 1 S. Peter v. 8.

^f Rev. xii. 10.

^g S. John xiii. 27.

^h S. Luke xxii. 3, Acts v. 3.

ⁱ 1 S. John iii. 8.

^k S. John xii. 31, xiv. 30, xvi. 11.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^m S. John viii. 44.

ⁿ Rev. xii. 12.

he knoweth that he hath but a short time." And, in the end, he will be allowed to put forth "° all power and signs and lying wonders, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;" to stamp his own likeness^p on all who will receive it, that, having borne his image here, they may be cast with him into the lake of fire.

We are bribed in our own case to disbelieve or to shrink from owning the possibility of that terrible fixedness in misery and evil. So God has exhibited it to us in our dreadful enemy. Malice more horrible we cannot imagine, than that of one, with that wonderful wide-embracing intelligence, himself, in eternity, beholding in its unendurable hopelessness of misery, yet employing all his marvellous skill in evil and his knowledge of man, in one unceasing toil to make the race of man like to himself, in suffering.

We have no reason, then, from experience, but the contrary, to think that the mere fact of passing out of this life, will change the bad into good. We see, even in this life, that mere suffering does not. It is a terribly vivid description, which has continually been verified; "ª they gnawed their tongues for pain and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds." We see, in Satan, that no knowledge, no experience of the consequences of sin, no sight of God, no presence of eternity, converts the soul to God. We know in our own selves, that more love could not be shewn us, than God has shewn us. What, as being yet in our probation, as being still capable of change, as not being fixed in evil, as being the objects of the love

° 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.
xvi. 2, xix. 20.

p Rev. xiii. 16, 17, xiv. 9, 11, xv. 2,

ª Rev. xvi. 10, 11.

not of the wrath of God, we cannot, (thanks be to God!) yet know, God has supplied to us in the knowledge of the Archfiend. What does there yet remain, which God *could* do, and which we do not see to be fruitless, unless we yield ourselves to His grace and love here, that we may be His, He our's, for ever?

Place alone does not make Heaven or Hell. Hell, with the love of God, were as heaven; without the love of God, it may be, it seems even probable, that Heaven would be the worse Hell. Hell may be the less misery to the damned. For to be in heaven and yet to be as a devil, to see the mutual bliss of creatures such as we once were, yet from our own hateful passions to be incapable of it, to see their joy in God and God's beatific unfolding of His Essence to their transported gaze, and ourselves, being such as we had unmade ourselves, incapable of any love or joy—the contrast of such bliss and such misery, such love and such hate, seems the worse hell. Think you, it were impossible to see God and to hate Him? God forbid, that we should be able to conceive it! Yet we see it in Satan. There is no middle line in the end between loving God and hating Him. “Haters of God^r” is one of habitual characters of human nature, left to itself. When God took flesh and dwelt among us “^sfull of grace and truth,” this was the witness which the Truth bore of us. “‘The world hateth Me, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil;” “^u He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also. Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” But hatred of God were in

^r Rom. i. 30, Ps. lxxx. 15, lxxxiii. 2, cxxxix. 21.

^s S. John i. 14.

^t Ib. vii. 7.

^u Ib. xv. 23, 24.

itself Hell. We were created for love, the love of our God, and of each other in God. To exist without love, without loving, without being loved, would in itself be unendurable misery. It were an unnatural existence, which must be restless and miserable because unnatural and missing that for which it was created. Not to love, is to hate. "We ourselves," says St. Paul^x of unregenerate nature, "were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." Apart from the central misery, the endless loss of the end of our being, of Him Who is still our God; apart from all those terrific physical miseries, of which our Lord speaks, the inextinguishable fire, the never-dying worm of each,—the society of the damned were misery unutterable. Conceive this alone, to which St. Paul says human nature of itself went, hatred of God, intrinsic hatefulness, hatred of one another. Gather in one in your mind an assembly of all those men or women, from whom, whether in history or in fiction, your memory most shrinks, (no fiction can reach the reality of human sin;) gather in mind all which is most loathsome, most revolting, the most treacherous, malicious, coarse, brutal, inventive, fiendish cruelty, unsoftened by any remains of human feeling; such as thou couldst not endure for a single hour; conceive the fierce fiery eyes of hate, spite, phrenzied rage, ever fixed on thee, glaring on thee, looking thee through and through with hate; sleepless in their horrible gaze; felt, if not seen; never turning from thee, never to be turned from, except to quail under

^x Tit. iii. 3.

the like piercing sight of hate; hear those yells of blaspheming concentrated hate, as they echo along the lurid vault of hell; every one hating every one, and venting that hate unceasingly with every inconceivable expression of malignity; conceive all this, multiplied, intensified, reflected all around, on every side; and, amid it, the especial hatred of any one, whose sins thou sharedst, whom thou didst thoughtlessly encourage in sin, or teach some sin before unknown—a deathlessness of hate were in itself everlasting misery. Yet a fixedness in that state, in which the hardened, malignant, sinner dies, involves, without any further retribution of God, this endless misery.

Thus far, then, the objection against God's justice in annexing eternal misery to the rejection of Himself in this short life, must take a new form. As we see in Satan, the sinner, even apart from God's judgments on sin, carries about within him his own Hell. So then men must question, not God's justice, in that sin, persevered in to the end of this life, must involve misery, coextensive with the being of the sinner; rather, if he question at all, he will have to question the wisdom and love of God, in that He created beings, capable of that awful choice, whether they would of their own free-will accept or reject Himself, and that for ever. And so we come back to the primal insoluble mystery, the origin of evil, which yet, unless we would be Atheists, we must admit to be compatible with the Existence of an All-good, All-loving, All-wise, Almighty God.

We may, with reverence, rejoice in that awful gift of our liberty and free-agency; we may rejoice in it, because it is the gift of God. But it is the key of

heaven and hell. Sanctified by the grace of God, we have that jubilant joy, above all joys, freely to love Him Who loved us and created us for His love, and gave us ourselves, that, by the might of His grace, we might, with the whole power of our natural and supernatural being, love Him. But the gift of immortal life, and the power of immortal love, involves also the power of rejecting the infinite love and the choice of the deathless death. God says, “^a why *will* ye die? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Wherefore turn and live ye.” But it may be, and seems to be, a contradiction, that an intelligent creature should not be endowed with a power of choice, (our word ‘intelligent’ primarily involves choice,) or that any being should have a really free inherent power to choose, and not be able to choose amiss and to abide perseveringly in that choice; or that that choice should not extend to That which is, above all, the Object of choice, the Supreme Good, God. Thoughtful men have held it to be a contradiction, that any created being should have the free power, freely to choose God, without the fearful corresponding power of refusing Him. Certainly, it seems so. Grace, which should not only bear us on with a mighty tide over every obstacle to choose our God, but which should be absolutely, physically, irresistible, would, of course, destroy free-will. With whatever preponderance of grace God might create any being, yet, if free-will is left at all, it must be free to reject God, and, if free to reject Him, then free also to reject Him perseveringly. And so, although both angels and man were created in a state

^a Ezek. xviii. 31, 2.

of grace, and were empowered, yea, were impelled by that grace, freely themselves to choose God, it would be a contradiction that there should be those created, whose bliss should be the perpetual inflow of the love of God and the vision of Himself, without there being those who, being created and endowed for the everlasting love of and communion with God, did, by a misuse of their free-will, shut themselves out eternally from it. This would in itself involve the eternal existence of the self-hating, each-other-hating, God-hating, hideous and miserable society of Hell.

Wherein the misery of Hell should consist, we can, of course, know from God only.

“^b Christ on Himself, considerate Master, took

The utterance of that doctrine’s fearful sound.

The Fount of Love His servants sends to tell

Love’s deeds ; Himself reveals the sinner’s Hell.”

He Himself has warned us, while we can escape them, and that we may escape them, what those sufferings are, and that they are eternal. O they seem to fall so heavily from His Human Soul ! It must have been the deepest grief of that God-united Soul, above every thing passing, above His own unutterable Sufferings, above that temporary forsaking by the

“^b When first God stirred me, and the Church’s word

Came as a theme of reverent search and fear

It little cost to own the lustre clear

O’er rule she taught, and rite, and doctrine poured ;

For conscience craved, and reason did accord.

Yet one there was that wore a mien austere,

And I did doubt, and, troubled, asked to hear

Whose mouth had force to edge so sharp a sword.

My mother oped her trust, the Holy Book ;

And healed my pang. She pointed, and I found

Christ, &c. *Lyra Apostolica* No 82 (*Dr Newman’s*) p. 97.

Father, and the bearing of our sins and His Father's wrath on sin, that there would be those, who *would* not be redeemed, who *would* still not love God, Who so loved them as to give His own Son for them, and so, who must eternally hate Him, and the wrath of God abide on them^c. How heavily they sound! They are not words of rebuke, but of solemn warning as to an evil choice. Part, He says, with any thing which causes thee to offend God, although it should be dear to thee, as right eye or hand or foot^d, and the parting as painful, as, thyself, to pluck them out or cut them off. "It is better for thee to enter into life, maimed, than having two hands, to go into Hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm (their own individual worm) dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Or, after that description of the merciful and the unmerciful, of those who fed, housed, clothed, visited, Christ in the poor, and of those who, in their selfish neglect of the poor, despised Christ, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life everlasting." "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

How mournfully tender are the words over the traitor, if they might yet scare him from his treason! "Good were it for that man, if he had never been born!" Yet good were it for us to have been born, if, after countless ages of any suffering^f, we were, at the end of them, to be restored and to behold God!

^c S. John iii. 36. ^d S. Mark ix. 43-48. ^e S. Matt. xxv. 46, 41.

^f "A hope that after the day of Judgement God's Mercy may, in the lapse of infinite ages, find some mode of restoring the lost, consistently with the maintenance of His purity and justice." Bp. Tait, The word of God and the ground of faith, Part II. Pref. p. vi.

God has made our salvation to cost *Him* so dear a price, and *us* so little, that men do not let themselves think, what is to them the value of salvation. All but eternity passes away ; what has passed away is as if it had never been. Countless myriads of years of suffering would come to an end, and if, when they had come to an end, the soul were then admitted to the beatific vision of God and the bliss in His Infinite love, all the past myriads of years of suffering would be but a speck, and would absolutely disappear, in that eternity of love. Good, eternally good would it be for that soul to have been born ; for it would, through whatever period of suffering in time, have attained to the one only End of the creature, eternal bliss in the Bliss of God.

“^gWhat doth it profit a man to gain the whole world,” our Lord again appeals to us, “and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Yet, if souls in the end were restored, they would not be lost. A person might lose a passing period of bliss, but even this would only be a loss which would then be utterly effaced. He might lose, (and even many of those who are saved do lose for ever,) a portion of the capacity of containing God and His infinite love. A stunted soul, although full according to its measure, has still not the same capacity of knowing or loving God, or containing the ever-filling Ocean of His Love. So far he is subject to great irreparable loss. But so great is the least portion of the love of God, so great the bliss of loving Him and being loved by Him, even if one were the narrowest soul which God had created, that, being

such, one would have gained an eternity of bliss, such as the Precious Blood of Christ and His infinite Merits could alone obtain for one. To "save his soul" and to "lose it," are plainly contradictories. Such an one would have saved his soul. It must then mean something else, something irreparable, to "lose" it.

So too when our Lord bids us, "^hFear not them which can kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell," death is opposed to death, destruction to destruction, a destruction, which is but partial, of this body in this fleeting life, to a destruction which is complete, of body and soul in Hell. Temporary suffering is *not* destruction. Not until the last torturing pang had crushed out the last quivering remains of life, had men killed the martyr's marred and shapeless body. What then can destruction of soul and body mean but that deathless death, from which all life is gone?

The Apostles, speaking by the Holy Ghost, do but say, in other words, the self-same truth. When they say, that "ⁱthey who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the Presence of the Lord, when He shall be revealed in flaming fire," what do they but echo those same words of our Lord, "everlasting punishment," "destroy body and soul in Hell" "depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire?" Or the beloved Apostle, when he had to describe how those not written in the book of life were cast into the lake of fire ^k; and each shall be tormented in fire and brim-

^h Ib. x. 28.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 7-9.

^k Rev. xx. 15.

stone, and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever^a.

You see then, even from these few places, how little the doctrine of everlasting punishment depends upon the meaning of the single word, *αἰώνιος*. Not that there is any doubt as to that word. It is a flimsy plea for an unbelief, not resting on such pleas but on men's *à priori* conceptions of their God, when some have said, that the Hebrew word which is used for eternity is used also for a term less than eternity.

Strange argument this, in the mouth of those who deny that the Hebrews knew of the immortality of the soul. As if it were any proof that our Lord did not mean to reveal immortality of suffering to those who did believe in the immortality of the soul, when He used the word which to them expressed everlasting, and only everlasting, because *a* word was used by the Hebrews^b, of eternity and also of time less than eternity. Yet even of the Hebrew word this at least is certain that it is not used prospectively of any thing less than an unbroken continuity, co-extensive with the existence of that of which it is spoken. “^cAn everlasting covenant” or “^da statute for ever” is a covenant or statute co-existent with the being of the people, as God's people; a “^eservant for ever” is a servant during his whole natural life. So then, when used of the Being of God, it expresses God's Eternity^f; when used of the kingdom of God^g or of Christ^h, it denotes a kingdom which shall have no

^a Ib. xiv. 10, 11. *εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων*.

^b עוֹלָם.

^c Gen. xvii. 7. 13. &c.

^d Lev. xvi. 29. &c. Ex. xii. 14, 17.

^e Deut. xv. 17, 1 Sam. xxviii. 12.

^f Gen. xxi. 33, Ps. xc. 2,

xciii. 2, Is. xl. 28.

^g Ps. ix. 8, x. 16, xxix. 10.

^h Ps. xlv. 7.

end ; when used of man's being after the resurrection, the "everlasting lifeⁱ" or "everlasting contemptⁱ," to which, it is declared, men shall severally rise, describe their mode of being, unending as themselves.

But, beyond even this, our Lord, when He declared the everlasting woe of those who should reject God unto the end, was speaking to those who already believed never-ending punishment; and the word^k, in which He willed that it should be handed down to all who should believe in Him, had, to a Greek, no other meaning. It would be a forced meaning in itself, it would have been a forced meaning to those to whom our Lord used it, if He had used it in any undefined sense. "Interpret the Scripture," men say^l, "like any book." Of what then could Plato or any Greek-speaking Heathen or Christian understand it, save of that which is truly everlasting? Of what could the poor understand it, to whom the Gospel was preached, whose special property it was and is? If endless duration of suffering, which Jews and Heathen believed when Jesus came, had been an error, what would these words be but an emphatic confirmation of the error? It is not a mere question of language. The moral aspect of the use of the word lies far deeper than any question as to its abstract meaning. It is this which edges the force of the familiar argument, that you must not take in two-fold and ambiguous senses the self-same word, under which our Lord in the same sentence spoke of the unending life and the unending death. The unmerciful shall go away into *everlasting* punishment^m, but

ⁱ Dan. xii. 2.

^k αἰώνιος.

^l Ess. and Rev. (Prof. Jowett.) p. 377.

^m κόλασιν αἰώνιον.

the righteous into life *everlasting*¹¹. If there is any one thing in the Gospel, which one should expect to be declared in clear and unmistakeable language, it would be the issue of this our state of trial here, *that* in which all should end, the result in which the acceptance or rejection of God's clearly-revealed will should issue, of weal or woe. Any how our Lord declares it repeatedly. If He used ambiguous words in this—I dare not, for reverence, finish the question. But—in what could you trust any one, who should use ambiguous language on such a subject as this? In what matter of this world would you trust one who, in any matter of this world, should use the self-same word in two distinct senses in the self-same sentence without giving any hint that he was so doing? In none. Find any case, in which you would trust a man, who did so in the things of men, and then ascribe it to your God in the things of God. I could not trust man. I could not believe it of my God. No! Whether any of you will hear or whether you will forbear, whether you will say, that it will drive others or yourselves into unbelief, *I* must be faithful to my God. Could I think that in one thing Jesus, the Truth, had used one ambiguous word, had used one word, calculated to convey what is not true, whether (God forgive the blasphemy!) as knowing or not knowing that He did so, my whole faith would be gone. For the word of Jesus would no longer be certain truth. What would remain, but an anticipated natural Hell, a sense of guilt, a sense of deserved punishment, and no Atoner, no Redeemer; none to pardon, none to heal?

¹¹ ζῶν αἰώνιον.

And who are the witnesses that our Lord meant what He said? Not a single speculator, (however original his genius,) but the poor, rich in faith, who received simply what was simply said. The Gospel is the Gospel of the poor. It was preached, "not in words of man's wisdom," but by "unlearned and ignorant men," by the tentmaker and the fishermen, with the power and wisdom of the Holy Ghost, to men like themselves. They, as our Lord appointed them, taught the world, and the world received His sayings. This, before Origen, was the belief of the world; this, it is said soon after St. John left this earth, "a many nations of barbarians" too "believed,

^a S. Iren. adv. Haeres. iii. 4. S. Irenæus, in paraphrasing the Apostles' Creed, distinctly mentions eternal punishment as part of the universal belief, derived from the Apostles. The whole passage is, "There being so great evidence, we ought not to seek further among others after the truth which we may obtain readily from the Church, since into it, as into a wealthy depository, the Apostles brought together most fully all which belongs to the truth; so that every one, whosoever will, may take from her the water of life. For this is the entrance into life; all the rest are thieves and robbers. Wherefore these we ought to avoid, but choose the things of the Church with the utmost diligence, and lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For what? Were it any small matter, which was questioned, ought we not to have recourse to the oldest Churches where the Apostles lived, and from these to derive, as to the present question, what is certain and clear? For if the Apostles had not even left us any Scriptures, ought we not to follow the rule of the tradition, which they delivered to those to whom they committed the Churches?"

"To which appointment many nations assent of those Barbarians who believe in Christ, having the salvation without paper and ink written in their hearts, and, keeping diligently the old tradition, believe in One God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and of things which are therein, through Jesus Christ the Son of God, Who, for His exceeding love for His creature, endured that birth of the Vir-

having salvation without paper and ink written by the Spirit in their hearts," "in speech, to the Greek, barbarians, but in doctrine and practice and conversation most wise for their faith's sake, well-pleasing to God, walking in all righteousness and purity and wisdom." "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum.*" The converted world ever believed that wrath to come from which they had fled. The unbelieving historian^b even assigns this as a ground of its rapid conversion, that they dreaded that wrath, forgetting that it is not in man's power to inwork into men the constraining active conviction of the awful justice of God. But the martyrs, in the simplicity of their faith, when they allowed themselves to be torn and mangled and burnt, their flesh shredded by the iron hooks or scorched by the red-hot iron chair, sooner than incur, as they said, eternal death by denying Christ, were better witnesses ^cto the truth which they believed, than the erratic speculative mind, which imagined an eternity, varying from weal to woe, and from woe to weal, consistent only in this, that it denied alike an eternity of ill and an eternity of unchanging bliss^d.

gin, Himself through Himself uniting man to God, and having suffered under Pontius Pilate, rising again, and received in glory, and to come in glory, the Saviour of all who are saved, and the Judge of those who are judged, and casting into eternal fire those who pervert the truth and despise His Father and His Coming. This faith, they who have without letters believed, are, as to our speech, Barbarians, but in doctrine" &c, (as in the text.)

^b Gibbon, Decl. and Fall. c. 16.

^c The evidence to the belief in eternal punishment from the simple sayings of the Martyrs, as given in Ruinart, was to me the more striking, as shewing the undoubting faith of the people.

^d Origen de princip. L. iii. in St. Jerome Ep. 124. ad Avit. § 11.

O poor, hapless, unintelligent acuteness of the natural man, how is it that thou seest not, that thou palimest deceits upon thyself, and by thy evasions of the truth condemnest thyself, that thou seekest, not the truth, but to escape the truth? How is it, that thou seest it not, when, so soon as thou canst imagine that the fire or the destruction may be everlasting, but the sinner not abide everlastingly in that fire or not feel that destruction, thou doubtest not, that the fire and the destruction do last for ever; that “everlasting” does mean “lasting for ever?” Or when again thou canst persuade thyself that it does not mean this, but some lengthened period of time, thou then doubtest not, that “destruction” is *not* “annihilation,” or that “punishment” does *not* mean mere loss or forfeiture of somewhat, but a real suffering—how is it, that thou dost not see, that, each time,

Vall. Origen taught also the transmigration of souls into animals, Ib. In popular works he taught the eternity of punishment. Tract. 34. in S. Matt. n. 72. p. 889. in Jerem. Hom. 18. n. 1. p. 241. In the c. Cels. vi. 26, he furnishes the ground of this. “All which might be said on this topic, it is not suitable to explain now or to all. Nay, neither is it without peril to entrust to writing the plain truth as to such things. For the many need no further teaching than that of the punishment of sinners. For it is not expedient to go further, on account of those who scarcely, through the fear of eternal punishment, (αἰωνίου κολάσεως, our Lord’s words, which he takes literally) restrain the outpouring into any amount of wickedness, and the sins thence resulting.” The statement as to those “scarcely restrained by fear of eternal punishment,” and the necessity of not speaking out, imply, of course, that the eternal punishment was the belief of Christians, which he was afraid to disturb. This doubtless was the ground, why his error was not condemned in early times. It had not spread, nor did he seek to gain adherents.

thou liest to thyself, admitting to thyself each time the natural meaning of God's words, so that thou be not compelled thereby to own the whole truth of God?

What is this, of which I have been speaking, brethren? Is it a question of the schools, a matter of opinion, about which one may harmlessly bandy arguments to and fro, an abstract speculation, on which it is of little moment whether we take the wrong side? Is it a question as to the attributes of Almighty God, which it depends upon us to decide? One should think so from the fearless way in which some peremptorily deny everlasting woe, on the ground of their *à priori* conception of Almighty God. When men so speak, they forget that they themselves are sinners. In fulness of life, men can "a put far" from them "the evil day," think lightly of sin, try to bribe by adulation God Most High and most Just. 'He is so loving, He will not punish!' Far different is it, in youth or age, when death comes very near; far wiser was that old Theology, in which men meditated daily on the four last things, Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell. No question of philosophy is it, but of the death which God has pronounced on sin; the death which we sinners have deserved; the endless shutting out from the Presence of God and from His holiness, which our sins entailed upon us: the death from which Jesus died to redeem us; and now, for ever, pleads, during this our day, for each one of us, the Merits of that Precious Death at the Right Hand of God.

It is not the question of one article of the faith only; for the faith is one, and lives or dies, as one.

Never will any one, in truth, believe the Redemption by Christ, who does not believe in Hell. God became man, to redeem,—from what? from what, according to them, is equally remedied without it. He died,—to purchase what? What, after a time, is to be bestowed alike on Judas and the beloved disciple, on Nero and St. Peter, on Messalina and the Blessed Virgin, on Satan or Michael the Archangel^b.

Never will you know any thing of the depth of sin, or the deeper depth of the love of Christ or of God, until you not only believe in the abstract, but accustom yourselves to think of that awful doom, to which each wilful rejection of God's voice in your conscience, and of God in that voice, was dragging you. Fear not to look at it. For, narrow though the bridge be which spans its lurid flames, that bridge is sure to those whom it upholds; for it is the Cross of Christ, and Christ Himself will stretch forth His Hand to lead thee safely over it. “^c He is our Guide, leading us gently over death.” Fear not to look at it, but fear, not

^b “If all rational creatures are alike, and if, out of virtues or vices, they at their own free-will are either raised on high or sunk in the deep, and after a long revolution and infinite ages, there shall be a restoration of all things, and the glory of all who have been on probation, be one, how will the virgin be removed from the prostitute? what difference will there be between the Mother of the Lord and (which to name is shame) the victims of the common lusts? Shall Gabriel then and the devil be all one? Apostles and dæmons, one? Prophets and false prophets, one? Martyrs and persecutors, one? Invent what thou wilt, redouble years and times, and throng with torments infinite ages, if the end of all is alike, all the past is as nothing, for the whole question is, not, what we have once been, but what we shall be for ever.” St. Jerome in Jonam iii. 6, 7. p. 419. Vallars. quoted by Huet Origenian. ii. 21. comp. Ep. 84. Pammach. et Ocean. § 7. p. 524. Vall. quoted ib.

^c Ps. xlviii. 14.

to look at it. It is almost a sacred proverb, that none are so likely to fall into Hell, as they who think themselves most secure of not falling into it. While you meditate on it, you will conceive a horror of your sins, which, step by step, were dragging you captive thither; you will fear to live separate from God here, as you would not live separate and alien from His love for ever; you will love *His* mercy, Who, being God, became Man and died in your stead, that you might not die eternally; you will love Him, Who was born, suffered, died, to gain our individual love, and while we, by each sin, thrust rudely His love from us, interceded unceasingly with God, that we might yet love Him and be loved by Him for ever. While we were preparing our own place in the "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," He was preparing for us our own individual place in the everlasting bliss around the Throne of God.

My son, if thou hadst a second soul to save, when thou shouldest lose thine own; if God had clearly revealed to thee, that there was a second state of probation for thee, when thou hadst rejected God perseveringly to the end in this; if He had revealed to thee as clearly that the wages of sin were *not* everlasting death, as He has, that they are,—then too sin would be base miserable ingratitude for His infinite love for each of us sinners. Would that one need say no more! Would that you, each and all, so loved God, as He deserves to be loved by you, as He, in His eternal love for you, made you to love Him, as, whatever you are, He now too, at this hour, loves you. But the love of God is known only by those who love. The fear of God displeased drives

men to God appeased. We dare not be wiser than God Who said by His Apostle, “^d knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.” We dare not be wiser than our Lord who said, “^e I will forewarn you, Whom ye shall fear; Fear Him Which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into Hell. Yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.” Listen not to them, who repeat to you the tempter’s words, “^fThou shalt not surely die.” Listen not to those Who would make Jesus a deceiver; but listen to Him Who was crucified for you, listen to Him Who loves you; so shall you for ever thank Him and bless Him, that the fear of Hell scared you back from sin, and made you take refuge in Him who loves you more tenderly than a mother doth, in the Bosom of your God and His everlasting love.

^d 2 Cor. v. 11.

^e S. Luke xii. 5.

^f Gen. iii. 4.

ADVERTISEMENT.

I had intended to reserve the publication of this Sermon for a small volume of University Sermons. Its earlier publication at the request of young friends here prevents my adding at present fuller critical notes.

E. B. P.

CHRIST CHURCH.